

Programme

Poly Styrene: Punk (DIY) and Somali Identity

Details

Saturday 12 September 2026, 11.00 – 17.00, in person at V&A South Kensington, Learning Centre, Hochhauser Auditorium.

Overview

Join us for a day celebrating and interrogating the art, identity and cultural practices of Marian Elliott-Said aka Poly Styrene, singer, songwriter, producer and co-founder of British punk group X-Ray Spex.

Led by Marian's daughter, Celeste Bell, the programme brings together film, poetry, performance, literature, and discussion to explore the continuing resonance of Poly Styrene's legacy. The day includes a screening of the award-winning documentary *Poly Styrene: I Am a Cliché*, followed by poetry and a panel exploring identity, music, activism and cultural preservation through the lens of Poly Styrene's work, and contemporary Black British alternative movements.

Discussions will examine themes of dual heritage, self-determination, countercultural production and the role of archives in preserving marginalised histories, and the collaboration with the Somali Museum, offering insight into Marian's Somali and British heritage and the social and political concerns that informed her creative practice.

Celeste Bell will be joined by **Stephanie Phillips (Big Joanie)**, acclaimed musician, author and journalist; **Kinsi Abdulleh**, interdisciplinary artist, curator, educator, Co-Director of Numbi Arts and Founder of the Somali Museum; and **Hodan Yusuf**, poet, writer and actor. Together, they will reflect on Poly

Styrene's pioneering legacy and its connections to contemporary movements in music, culture and community organising.

Arrival

On arrival, please use the Exhibition Road Entrance of the Museum and make your way to Hochhauser Auditorium, Learning Centre, Level 1 where you will be met by Janz Browne, Senior Producer Africa and Diaspora.

For details of the Exhibition Road entrance please click here rb.gy/qzl98b for the digital map. For any accessibility requirements, please email courses@vam.ac.uk

Schedule

10.45 – 11.00 (15 min)

Arrival, Registration, and Refreshments

11.00 – 11.15 (15 min)

Welcome, Housekeeping, and Introductions, Janz Browne

11.15 - 12.55 (100 min)

Poly Styrene: I Am a Cliché, film screening

Explores the life, art, and enduring legacy of punk icon and X-Ray Spex frontwoman Poly Styrene. Directed by Paul Sng and Celeste Bell, this award-winning documentary follows Celeste's journey through her mother's unseen archive, examining identity, race, mental health, and artistic independence, and celebrating one of the most original and subversive voices in counterculture history.

12.55 - 13.45 (50 mins)

Lunch Break

Bring a packed lunch. Beverages will be available. Poly Styrene Soundtrack listening session

13.45 – 13.55 (10 min)

Welcome back and introductions Janet Browne

13.55 - 14.10 (15 min)

Poetry Performance with Hodan Yusuf, poet, writer and actor introduced by Kinsi Abdullah, interdisciplinary artist, curator, educator.

14.10 - 14.30 (20 min)

Somali Museum and its relationship with the Poly Styrene Archive with Kinsi Abdullah, Co-Director of Numbi Arts and Founder of the Somali Museum

The Somali Museum is urgently needed to capture and preserve our community's living memory, stories, music and everyday practices that have often been overlooked by formal archives. The Museum fills a crucial gap, acting as a living extension of the archive and ensuring these histories are not only preserved but remain active, giving future generations the opportunity to connect with and learn from their heritage. The Poly Styrene Archive and the work of Celeste Bell are central to this journey.

14.30 - 15.25 (55 min)

Panel Discussion: DIY and the Diaspora

Chaired by Celeste Bell author, educator, filmmaker, and musician; Stephanie Phillips (Big Joanie) musician, author, journalist, and cultural organiser; and Kinsi Abdulleh interdisciplinary artist, curator, educator and Co-Director of Numbi Arts and Founder of the Somali Museum.

Themes:

- **Identity & Intersectionality:** Navigating dual heritage and British identity through the lens of Marian Elliot-Said (Poly Styrene) and contemporary Black British subcultures.
- **DIY as Liberation:** Self-determination through zines, independent labels, and community spaces, from 1970s punk to modern movements such as Decolonise Fest.
- **Radical Sonic Spaces:** Breaking genre boundaries across punk, ska, and alternative music and the role of Black people in alternative music scenes as chronicled in Stephanie Phillips' *We Were Here: A History of Black People and Alternative Music*
- **Archiving & Custodianship:** Preserving marginalised histories, personal ephemera, and countercultural memory through grassroots institutions like the Somali Museum UK.

- **50 Years of She-Punk:** Connecting Poly Styrene's pioneering blueprint to today's generation of underground female artists, celebrated in the 2026 arts and music festival *Up Yours! God Save the Queens*.

15.25 - 15.50 (20 min)

Audience Q&A with the panel

15.50 - 16.00 (10 min)

Concluding thoughts from the organisers.

16.00 - 16.45 (45 min)

Book and Zine Signing

We Were Here: A History of Black People and Alternative Music by Stephanie Phillips

Oh Bondage Up Yours!: Issue 1 Inaugural Zine by Up Yours! Collective

In collaboration with the Poly Styrene Archive Estate of Marian Elliott-Said, Celeste Bell, and the Somali Museum.

This event is part of the wider celebration of The Music Is Black: A British Story Exhibition.

Note: V&A Academy programmes are subject to change without notice.

Biographies

Celeste Bell is an author, educator, filmmaker, and musician. As the daughter of punk icon Poly Styrene, she has dedicated much of her career to preserving her mother's multifaceted legacy. She co-directed and narrated the award-winning documentary *Poly Styrene: I Am a Cliché* (2021) and co-authored *Dayglo: The Poly Styrene Story*. Bell is a co-founder (alongside Lauren Estelle Jones and Vivien Goldman) of the Up Yours! Collective, whose 2026 God Save the Queens festival celebrates 50 years of women in punk and alternative music scenes.

WEBSITE <https://upyourscollective.com/>

INSTAGRAM <https://www.instagram.com/upyourscollective/>

Kinsi Abdulleh is an interdisciplinary artist, curator, and educator known for her work rooted in social justice and community engagement. She is the co-director of Numbi Arts, a Somali-led, African-centered arts and heritage organisation based in East London. Abdulleh is also the founder of the Somali Museum, a virtual and physical space that tells the stories of Somali communities both in the UK and globally. Her projects focus on amplifying underrepresented voices, particularly within Somali and African diasporic communities. She is dedicated to exploring themes such as migration, heritage, and social empowerment.

Stephanie Phillips is an acclaimed musician, author, journalist, and cultural organiser. She is the guitarist and singer of the MOBO-nominated Black feminist punk band Big Joanie, as well as a co-founder of Decolonise Fest, the UK's annual music festival for punks of colour. Named Music Journalist of the Year at the 2021 International Music Journalism Awards, her writing has appeared in The Guardian, The Wire, and Bandcamp. She is the author of Why Solange Matters and We Were Here: A History of Black People and Alternative Music, cementing her vital role as an artist, curator, and leading chronicler of alternative counterculture.

Hodan Yusuf is a poet, writer and actor. In 2019, Hodan's screen debut acting role landed her a part in the J.J. Abrams & Warner Bros television series, Castle Rock. Hodan wrote, directed and performed her first play Refu(ge) Tree, in 2020, for the international theatre festival Same Boat Arts Collective, screened live online across London, Delhi and San Francisco. Her essay "Waiting to Exhale - The Scarcity of Safe Spaces" was published in 2021, in the Unbound anthology Cut From the Same Cloth. Hodan played the lead in the short film by director and photographer Amaal Said, Open Country. She was also in the short film directed by Kelechi Okafor, The Voicenote (2025). Hodan is one of the leads on the upcoming feature film "In the Shadows" by multi-award-winning director Anthony Wonke, the biopic of Ramla Ali the Somali British boxer which will have its UK cinematic release on the 30 October 2026.